Achieving Full Participation in the Life of Alberta

Status Report

Premier's Council on the Status of Persons
with Disabilities Action Plan
May 1991

Alberta

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I Overview

"Citizenship is the right of persons with disabilities and having a disability should not deny anyone access to the same services, rights and responsibilities as others."

Approximately 279,000 Albertans live with some form of disability. Though these individuals represent 11.9% of Alberta's population (Statistics Canada, 1986 Census), their needs, concerns and desires have not always been well met by government programs and services. At a very basic level, these programs and services were not necessarily designed to ensure persons with disabilities were given full and equal opportunity to participate in the life of the province.

The government of Alberta acknowledged this situation at a March 1987 meeting between Rick Hansen ("Man in Motion") and Premier Don Getty. After this meeting, Mr. Getty created The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons With Disabilities. The Council was given a ten-year mandate during which it would advise the government on methods of offering all persons with disabilities the opportunity to take their rightful place in society. In June, 1989, the Premier's Council outlined a shared vision designed to transform attitudes and provide the basis for a new policy framework. "Towards a New Vision of Abilities in Alberta" provided the stimulus for discussion and change, with a focus on the goal of equal status for all persons with disabilities.

"Each section of the Action Plan begins with a description of the issues and how they affect persons with disabilities. This is followed by a section which highlights . . . why change is needed".

The Premier's Council undertook a comprehensive study of the issues affecting persons with disabilities. In the Spring of 1990, it released its *Action Plan*. This *Action Plan* recommended ways for the government to better respond to the needs of all Albertans with disabilities.

". . . we have focused on . . . issues that were identified by people with disabilities as the most crucial to their ability to participate in society . . . "

The *Action Plan* of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons With Disabilities focused on nine policy areas in which changes were needed:

- training
- employment
- education
- transportation
- recreation
- housing
- accessibility
- personal supports
- financial supports.

"Recommended Action includes the specific government department to which the

recommendation is directed and the proposed time frame for accomplishing the change."

The Government of Alberta agreed with the basic thrust of the *Action Plan*. However, the recommendations required a multitude of policy and program changes, involving 12 government departments.

Alberta Family and Social Services, Alberta Health and other departments were in the process of responding to the previously released Brassard Report, *Claiming My Future*. This report on persons with mental disabilities complemented the *Action Plan*. Therefore, the government's response required a great deal of coordination and consultation.

To ensure an effective government response, Premier Getty directed the Honourable Jim Dinning to act as the Minister responsible for the Premier's Council. One of Mr. Dinning's first actions was to call together the ministers of the 12 departments affected by the *Action Plan*.

Mr. Dinning asked these ministers to provide their responses to recommendations that affected their departments. The purpose of doing so was to create a workable structure and process for a comprehensive and effective government response to the *Action Plan*.

▶ *"Council had already determined that it would be looking for changes to the system rather than 'quick fixes' which would not produce the desired long-term results."*

The government has responded to the *Action Plan* in a positive and forthright manner. Of the 114 actions specified in the *Action Plan*, 30 have already been implemented. Another 66 actions are in the process of being implemented and 18 are under various stages of review.

This report summarizes the changes the government has achieved to date, and outlines the activities which are underway to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to the same services, rights and responsibilities as other Albertans.

II Personal Supports

▶ *"It is the position of the Premier's Council that the provision of personal supports should be separate and distinct from the need for income support, age, place of residence or the ability to fit into some predefined program."*

Achievements - Home Care Program:
The primary purpose of the Home Care Program is to support individuals and their families when a person wishes to remain at

home despite significant health problems or disabling conditions.

The *Action Plan* envisions a Home Care Program which will provide medical and non-medical supports to an extended clientele under the age of 65. The need for many people under 65 is primarily for non-medical supports.

Two related strategies have been approved for expanding the Home Care Program to provide more services to persons under 65:

- The Home Care Program will expand its eligibility criteria to include persons under 65 who require only support services.

- A three-year transition strategy has been approved to serve individuals who need home health and support services and who are currently served by Alberta Family and Social Services. Under this strategy, the Home Care Program will gradually assume responsibility for home health and support services for all persons with physical disabilities.

Achievements - Alberta Aids to Daily Living (AADL) Program:
Both the Extended Health Benefits and the AADL programs were designed to help individuals who have long-term disabilities and/or were diagnosed as chronically or terminally ill. These programs provide a wide variety of basic medical supplies and equipment to enable them to function more independently at home or in a home-like setting.

At present, seniors can receive medical supplies and equipment at no cost, under the Extended Health Benefits (EHB) program. However, those under 65 must contribute to the costs of benefits under AADL. In addition, some benefits are available only under EHB. The Premier's Council recommended that existing age and diagnostic barriers be removed and that the program be applied equitably across different groups.

As of July 1, 1991, the AADL and EHB programs will be amalgamated. Albertans eligible for benefits will be required to cost-share 25% of the costs, to a maximum of $500 per family per year. However, low-income Albertans will be exempt from charges. In addition, those who receive the Alberta Assured Income Plan, Alberta Widow's Pension, Social Allowance or Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped will to be exempt from cost-sharing.

Additional steps will be taken to make the program more equitable. Additional funds which result from cost sharing and removing some low-cost benefits will be used to extend some benefits to all age groups and to add benefits for other kinds of disabilities.

Achievements - Community Supports:
The *Action Plan* recommended the government establish a new approach to providing personal supports to persons with

disabilities. As a result, the government is considering initiatives that will move toward a more consolidated approach to delivery of personal supports. Most notably, over the next few years, the Home Care Program will become the focus for the delivery of health and support services in the home for persons with physical disabilities.

The Community Supports Task Force is made up of representatives from eight government departments and the Premier's Council. The Task Force is developing an incremental plan which will move government services further in the direction of consolidated delivery. This five-year plan will include several distinct phases. Each phase will be evaluated before the next phase is begun.

The objective of this approach is to improve services for persons with disabilities by ensuring a coordinated, consistent and effective delivery system. Such a system could ultimately incorporate a variety of support programs which already exist in various government departments, as well as other components which may be required to meet unmet needs. A report outlining the plan is expected soon.

Changes Underway - Mental Health Philosophy:
The Mental Health Division of Alberta Health has developed a paper 'New Directions for Mental Health Services in Alberta'. The document's purpose is to communicate the guiding policy for the further development of the province's mental health system. This policy statement will be the basis for the enhancement and strengthening of the mental health system and will be refined following consultation with key stakeholders (e.g. Provincial Advisory Committee on Mental Health Issues).

The mental health system is striving to achieve a balance of services between hospital and community-based programs. Every attempt is being made to ensure that all approved mental health programs are coordinated and mutually supportive. One such service delivery model is currently being evaluated in Grande Prairie. This model is designed to improve the balance between institutional and community-based services by coordinating existing models of community support for people with mental illness.

Changes Underway - Individual Service Needs for Persons with Disabilities:
Alberta Health is developing a model for self-managed care using direct funding under the Home Care Program. Alberta Family and Social Services is developing Individual Lifestyle Planning models and is identifying personal support components and potential funding guidelines.

Changes Underway - Services for Persons with Brain Injuries:
Alberta Health is completing a consultative planning process with stakeholders about the needs of persons with brain injuries. Survivors of brain injuries, family members, advocacy groups and service providers contributed to a public discussion paper that identifies the needs of survivors and

their families and suggests priorities for new service and program development. The paper has been circulated widely throughout the province for public comment and feedback. The results will be used in developing a comprehensive plan for government consideration.

Changes Underway - Integrating Persons With Mental Handicaps Into Community Life:
Alberta Family and Social Services is examining ways to assist persons with mental disabilities who wish to move from the institution to the community to do so.

III Accessibility

"Access to all public buildings and facilities is a human right, and yet such access is often denied to persons with different types of disabilities."

Achievement - Alberta Building Code Revisions:
Alberta Labour has adopted the 1990 Alberta Building Code. Changes to the Building Code will implement 16 *Action Plan* recommendations related to accessibility. The primary intent of these changes is to ensure that persons with disabilities will have adequate access to public and residential facilities. Changes to the Building Code include, for example, requirements for visual alarm signals in any building intended to be barrier-free.

Achievement - Barrier-Free School Buildings:
Alberta Education has developed guidelines to assist school jurisdictions to provide school buildings that are barrier-free. Funding for handicapped facilities is available under the Building Quality Restoration and Modernization programs. Alberta Education will allocate funds according to the following priorities:

- first, to schools with students who have disabilities
- second, to schools with students whose parents have disabilities
- third, to schools offering continuing education programs to the general public.

Achievement - Barrier-Free Transportation Advisory Committee:
Alberta Transportation and Utilities has established a Barrier-Free Transportation Advisory Committee. This committee is made up of representatives of disabled consumers, seniors, urban and rural municipalities, and industry. The mandate of the Advisory Committee is to assist in the development and implementation of its policy on barrier-free transportation and mobility in the province. The Barrier-Free Transportation Advisory Committee reports to the Assistant Deputy Minister, Planning and Development Division of the Department of Transportation and Utilities.

Achievements - Barrier-Free Approaches To Buildings:
Alberta Public Works, Supply and Services has implemented projects and continues to introduce projects which eliminate accessibility barriers to government-owned or operated facilities. Introduction

of special parking spaces, curb cuts and exterior ramps are some examples.

Achievements - Community Facilities Accessibility Upgrade:
Through Alberta Lotteries Major Exhibitions and Fairs, the Community Facility Enhancement Program has supported projects which have improved accessibility to community facilities. Features such as elevators, ramps, lifts and washrooms have been added. Another example is assistance in providing special playground equipment for children with disabilities.

Achievements - Barrier-Free Policy:
The Premier's Council recommended that Alberta Recreation and Parks develop a policy on barrier-free access to all publicly funded parks and recreation facilities. The department has established a committee to develop barrier-free design guidelines.

The Premier's Council also recommended that Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism develop a barrier-free policy. It was recommended this policy address establishing minimum standards for the provision of alternatives to print for people with visual impairment, and hearing augmentation or interpreters for people with hearing impairment. A committee has been established to deal with this matter.

". . . persons with disabilities are often denied access and are not encouraged in their leisure pursuits . . . leisure activities, which are necessary to everyone's mental, emotional, and physical development and well-being, are often overlooked as unimportant for persons with disabilities . . . "

Changes Underway - Barrier-Free Design Standards Committee:
Alberta Recreation and Parks has appointed a senior staff member to be responsible for barrier-free policy, and has established a committee to develop a policy on barrier-free access to all publicly funded parks and recreation facilities. The policy will include developing a minimum standard for access for the disabled in the Provincial Parks Service.

Changes Underway - Barrier-Free Access to Publicly Funded Cultural Facilities and Events:
Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism is assessing how the hearing impaired can be served better at performances in the Jubilee Auditoriums. In addition, facilities such as the Reynolds and Remington Museums, which are under construction, are reviewing plans to ensure access for disabled persons.

Changes Underway - Barrier-Free Transportation and Mobility Policy Statement:
The Advisory Committee on Barrier-Free Transportation is made up of representatives of disabled consumers, senior citizens, urban and rural municipalities, and industry. The committee is now developing a barrier-free

transportation and mobility policy statement. This policy is expected to direct all future work of the department.

Changes Underway - Designated Parking Use in Municipalities:
Amendments to the Highway Traffic Act are being drafted. The amendments, which would permit enforcement of designated parking for disabled use in municipalities, are expected to be introduced in the Spring of 1991. The Advisory Committee on Barrier-Free Transportation has had extensive consultations with disabled consumers and municipalities, in order to determine workable solutions to the issues related to parking for persons with disabilities.

Changes Underway - Accessibility of Transportation Systems and Pedestrian Environments:
Alberta Transportation and Utilities and the Advisory Committee on Barrier-Free transportation are working together to ensure accessibility of all transportation systems and pedestrian environments under the jurisdiction of municipalities. Committees have been established with municipal transit and other representatives, to develop common provincial standards. Some of these standards will be ready for implementation in 1991. Proposals for changes to the existing transportation grant programs will be made as part of the department's regular review and renewal of these programs.

Changes Underway - Elimination of Barriers Within Government Buildings:
Alberta Public Works, Supply and Services is completing a survey to assess conditions and to set priorities for accessibility upgrading of government buildings.

IV Education

". . . many children with disabilities are not able to take their rightful place beside their peers within the education system. Instead of unconditionally accepting and providing for all children the best possible education, the response of the system . . . has been to segregate students who present particular challenges to educators."

Achievements - Integration of Special Needs Students:
Integration of special needs students is a top priority for both the Premier's Council and Alberta Education. Alberta Education has released a Special Education Review *Action Plan* to explore needed changes in the provision of services to special needs students. The Education Response Centre has held regional meetings and developed a paper for discussion at the Minister's Forum on Special Education held in May 1991. Additionally, in November, 1990, Honourable Jim Dinning, Minister of Education outlined a Vision for Education in the 1990's. The vision indicates that integration will become the norm for disabled children with only a small few needing specialized non-integrated programs.

Achievements - Early Childhood Services:
Alberta Education policy has been revised to ensure the acceptance of all children with disabilities in the age group served by an Early Childhood Services operator. Where younger children cannot be accommodated, operators should assist parents in finding an alternative placement.

Achievements - Testing and Assessment Supports:
A testing and assessment handbook and a teachers' guide for identifying and responding to students who are socially, emotionally or psychologically 'at risk' have been completed.

Achievements - Assessment Follow-up:
Alberta Education advocates, as generally accepted practice, that school boards must provide for a child's special needs as identified in preschool assessments that may have been completed on the child. This approach must be reflected in the student's Individual Program Plan.

Achievements - External Assessments:
When parents independently obtain an educational assessment of their child by qualified personnel, Alberta Education asks school jurisdictions to consider such assessments as one indicator of student needs.

Achievements - Developing A Unique Program for Each Special Needs Student:
Individual Program Plans are mandatory for all special needs students. The development, implementation and review of Individual Program Plans should involve a multidisciplinary team of professionals as well as parent or guardians. The mandatory Individual Program Plan requires that the parent, and where possible, the student, be involved in making decisions.

Achievements - Program Supports:
Alberta Education provides for the equitable allocation of resources, supports and inservice programs to assist teachers and teacher aides with curricular and instructional techniques for students with disabilities.

Achievements - Inservice Packages:
Alberta Education has developed resources and inservice packages for the following:

- teaching the gifted and talented
- teaching the learning disabled
- teaching the behaviour disordered
- developing Individual Program Plans.

The department will continue to work with the Alberta Teachers' Association and Alberta Advanced Education to better equip teachers to educate disabled persons. Alberta Education has developed an Individual Program Plans kit (consisting of a handbook, videotape, and sample program formats). Workshops are being held in school jurisdictions on the development of Individual Program Plans and managing the needs of behaviour disordered students.

Changes Underway - Performance Standards:
In its Special Education Review, Alberta Education is addressing standards for developing, evaluating, and monitoring .

special education programs and student performance outcomes. In particular, the Review is recommending that specific performance standards be established for students with disabilities.

Changes Underway - Adequacy of Funding for Special Education:
The Special Education Review is also addressing the adequacy of funding allocations to school boards. The Review is re-evaluating current funding, assessing the usefulness of individual versus block (per pupil) funding in terms of meeting student needs, and examining the total expenditures for special education, and the extent of local contribution.

V Training

"Training is the key to employment, and employment is one key to empowerment, so a more coordinated, consolidated and aggressive approach to provision of training is imperative if persons with disabilities are going to acquire the skills and qualifications to contribute both economically and socially to the community."

Achievements - Students' Finance Board:
The Alberta Students' Finance Board has re-examined the level of support available for students. As a result of the Students' Finance Board program review, the level of support available for disadvantaged students increased from $12,800 to $13,500 in March 1990. This level has been further increased to $13,800 for 1991-92. Grants of $2,000 also are available for disabled persons.

Changes Underway - Students' Finance Board:
An Interdepartmental Adult Student Aid Committee has been established to coordinate provincial policy development and delivery of student aid. Comprised of representatives from the Students' Finance Board, Alberta Family and Social Services and Alberta Career Development and Employment, the committee will examine the coordination of support for disadvantaged students.

Changes Underway - Vocational Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons Program:
Action Plan recommendations dealing with training are addressed to Alberta Career Development and Employment, Alberta Family and Social Services, and Alberta Advanced Education. Of the ten recommendations addressing training, one is fully implemented and nine are in process of being considered by the departments affected.

An interdepartmental task force has been established. It will address the consolidation of vocational rehabilitation and training for persons with disabilities under Alberta Career Development and Employment. This responsibility is currently shared between Alberta Family and Social Services and Alberta Career Development and Employment.

The objectives of the task force are to: increase labour market participation of individuals with disabilities, increase the employment rate of individuals with disabilities, and provide services which are individually based and responsive to individual needs.

Changes Underway - On-Campus Support Services:
Alberta Advanced Education has completed a research project in cooperation with the University of Alberta to identify the kinds of special support services required by hearing impaired students. Projected enrollments, feasible delivery methods, and projected annual costs of such services have been examined. In cooperation with post-secondary institutions, Alberta Advanced Education will use recommendations from the report to plan special support services for hearing impaired students.

VI Employment

▶ *"Persons with disabilities have the same needs for achievement and success through employment as other Albertans, but statistics show that they do not enjoy the same opportunities for participation in meaningful employment."*

Achievements - Business Program:
Alberta Economic Development and Trade has a new pilot program, Ability Plus, which is intended to increase business opportunities for entrepreneurs who have been economically impaired by their disabilities. The program will provide financial assistance and business expertise to enable persons with disabilities to start a new business or expand an existing one.

Changes Underway - Policy on Supports-In-Employment:
Alberta Career Development and Employment, in consultation with employers and stakeholders, has begun the development of a support for employment policy. This policy will address the identification of the range of supports that is necessary for persons with disabilities to secure and maintain employment.

VII Housing

▶ *"Examples of the wide range of shelter options which must be made available to persons with disabilities are rental accommodation, housing cooperatives, home ownership, group residences, 'approved homes', . . . transitional housing, and emergency shelter."*

Changes Underway - Shelter Options for Disabled Needs:
The Housing Divisions of Alberta Municipal Affairs are working with individuals and organizations that are involved with the disabled to develop a draft housing policy and to identify a broad range of shelter

options which must be available to meet the needs of all persons with disabilities. The draft housing policy will address feasible alternatives to increase choices in housing location. The Housing Divisions also will review the policy on barrier free units in provincially-funded projects throughout the province.

At this time, the Housing Divisions are working with the existing housing registries and other groups representing people with disabilities to review the feasibility of establishing a cross-disability provincial housing registry. The divisions are prepared to review the income guidelines for the Home Adaptation Program, in consultation with interest groups, from time to time, to ensure that those in need are being served.

Changes Underway - Cross-Disability Advisory Committee:
The Housing Divisions, Alberta Municipal Affairs, will set up and participate in a cross-disability advisory committee to address policy issues related to housing for persons with disabilities. Terms of reference will specify the scope and nature of the committee's work. The committee will meet on an ongoing basis to address a variety of policy issues.

The Housing Divisions will be calling for nominees to the cross-disability advisory committee in the summer of 1991. The divisions will contact a variety of stakeholder groups regarding nominations to the committee.

The initial committee meeting will take place in the fall of 1991. It is anticipated that the committee will meet twice a year to advise the divisions on the development of housing policy.

VIII Financial Supports

▶ *"Objective: A revamped income support system that renews its commitment to the dignity and independence of persons with severe disabilities by 1992."*

Changes Underway - Evaluation of the AISH/VRDP Assessment Project:
Alberta Career Development and Employment, in cooperation with Alberta Family and Social Services, has established a pilot project to provide coordinated assessment services to applicants for the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program. This pilot project will ensure that clients are aware of all training and rehabilitation options open to them and that assessment expertise is well utilized.

IX Information

▶ *"A multitude of programs offering services and/or funding to people with disabilities is provided by the*

various levels of government and by community organizations. However, there is no single or unified source of information about these programs that facilitates easy access by individuals or their advocates, program planners, policy makers, service providers, or anyone else who may benefit from this knowledge."

Changes Underway - Creation of a Disability Information Network in Alberta: Discussions between Alberta Recreation, Parks and Wildlife and the Alberta Centre for Well Being have been ongoing for several months. The purpose of these discussions is to review the department's funding, with a view to supporting an expanded role for the Centre to include the development of a regional database, and the use of the Disability Information Services of Canada to create an Alberta Information Network. This network would be established as a separate project within the Centre, with regional databases initially in Edmonton, Calgary and Lethbridge. The Premier's Council is prepared to commit some funds for the initial setup.

X Conclusion

▶ *"The Council believes strongly that the **system** must change in order for individuals to really benefit in the future."*

The actions outlined in this report are the first steps toward ensuring persons with disabilities have the same access to services, rights, and responsibilities as other Albertans. Much work still remains to be done to achieve this goal. However, the cooperative partnerships which have already been forged are one clear sign that this goal is achievable. The system can and will be improved and persons with disabilities can and will take their rightful place in society.

To ensure that progress continues, Mr. Dinning will work with other Cabinet Ministers to establish an inter-departmental Assistant Deputy Minister Committee to coordinate further departmental responses to the Premier's Council *Action Plan*.

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